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Time Management

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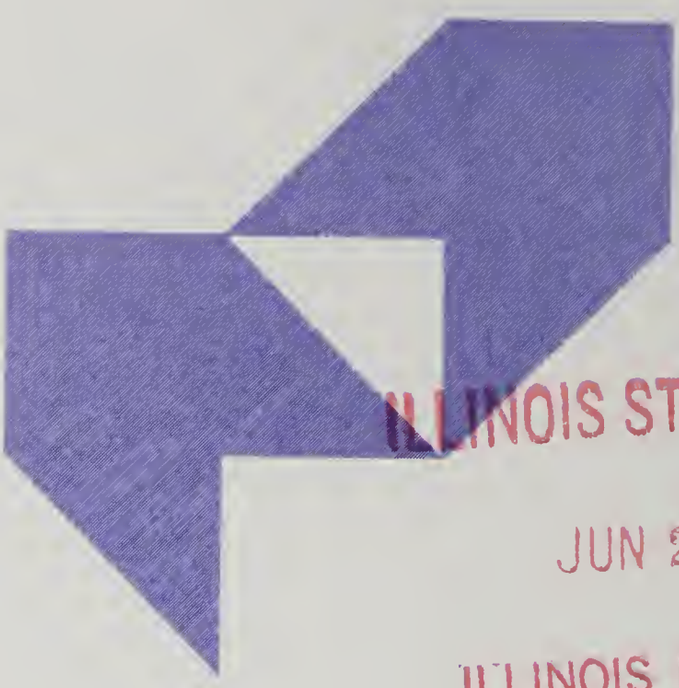

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Managing your time successfully is the secret to accomplishing not only what you must . . . but also what you want. When you don't accomplish what you should, you may feel confused, compromised, and frustrated. You may begin wondering "Where did I go wrong?" "Why couldn't I get that job done on time as I had planned?" "Why can't I ever meet deadlines?" In seeking answers to these questions, many persons become absorbed in the time management techniques they have seen work for others . . . and completely ignore the attitudinal principles underlying those techniques — yet both are important.

Consider the following myths which demonstrate how certain attitudes can work against effective time management.

MYTH: My life is completely controlled by external events.

FACT: You can have control over many aspects of your life, but you and you alone are responsible for initiating that control. Persons who don't believe they control their lives are constantly looking for clear-cut signals to motivate them. For instance, they depend on external events such as deadlines and expectations others have for them to guide and tell them how and when they should perform various tasks. Learning to recognize what you *can* control in relation to the choices you have is the first step in the process of managing your time. By anticipating the future and clarifying the external demands that must be faced, you will develop a base from which to start. Evaluate what must be done within the given time frame and determine what can be postponed.

MYTH: I should meet everyone's expectations.
FACT: The needs and demands of others may be inappropriate for you and your lifestyle. They may be poorly timed, highly questionable, or simply unattainable. They may be of a different priority than your own. By trying to meet the expectations of others, you may be shortchanging yourself and *your needs*. You need to be clear about what your needs are first . . . before you consider what others expect of you.

MYTH: I should have no limits.
FACT: We all have limits . . . failure to acknowledge this may cause you to become perfectionistic in your expectations. Perfectionists are especially prone to procrastination because the perfection they demand is impossible. And because they never meet their standards, these individuals never have a sense of accomplishment nor do they get a chance to feel good about themselves. Having reasonable expectations allows you the freedom to set time management goals that are within your grasp and that can help you achieve a sense of success.

Other Contributing Factors

Awareness of several other contributors to a positive attitude can lead to more effective time management.

- Be aware of your biological rhythms and use them to your advantage. For example, if you work best in the morning, do not plan all your studying for the evening. Take advantage of times when your energy levels are at their highest and do your most demanding work at those times.

- Be aware of the importance of rewarding yourself for progress. All tasks can be divided into smaller segments suitable for reward as they are accomplished. Remember, however, to reward the accomplishment — not the intention. To say "I've decided to write the paper tomorrow, therefore, I deserve to go to the movies tonight," is rewarding only the good intention. Rewarding intention can destroy your motivation to begin.
- Be aware that the physical characteristics of your work environment can help or hinder your success. Keep things you need in your work area and make sure the physical environment in conducive to concentration as opposed to comfort. Also, make sure items are within arm's reach, and your work area is free from clutter, visual distraction, or noise.

Specific Techniques

While it is important to develop your own style for managing your time and work, consider how the following techniques might help you.

- *Develop an overview of everything that you want to accomplish.* If your perspective is a semester, your first step should be to define clearly the goals that must be accomplished within that semester. This first step should be all inclusive — include not only academic responsibilities but also personal and social activities.
- *Next, identify the goals in all areas of your life which you consider important.* Decide which need immediate attention and which can be postponed. Be realistic about your time resources.
- *Anticipate deadlines and foreseeable crises (midterms, finals week, dates papers are due) and plan in advance to make these deadlines part of your routine.* Construct a reasonable timetable and insert the proper dates for these responsibilities.
- *Now work backward through the timetable and include the activities which can be scheduled more flexibly* (athletics, exercise, special hobbies).
- As you again review your timetable, consider each week as a subcategory to be planned, and each day within the given week as a further subcategory but an integral part of the whole picture. Identify specific goals for each week and

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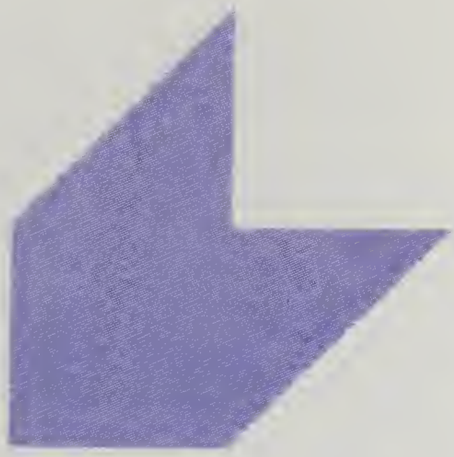

assign the categories of "A," "B," or "C" to each goal. Assign "A" to those items which are most important, "B" to those of moderate importance, and "C" to those low in importance.

- Now look at the items on your "B" list. Re-evaluate and reclassify them to either "A" or "C" categories. Either increasing or decreasing their importance will eliminate your being distracted by activities which could compete with your most important priorities.
- Avoid getting bogged down in "C" tasks. Do not hesitate to skip these activities or delegate them to others. For example, if you can afford it, hire someone to type your papers — especially if you are not an experienced typist. Always keep in mind the eighty/twenty rule which states that 80 percent of the value obtained by doing a typical list of activities comes from doing the most important 20 percent of those activities.
- Finally, review your list of activities in the "A" category. Determine the steps you need to follow to reach these goals. Segment larger activities into a series of self-starter units. Eliminate the routine and low priority tasks.

Avoid Time Wasters and Interruptions

There will be times when you may find it difficult to implement your best plans or intentions. You may frequently find that time-wasters and interruptions are the culprits. Therefore, safeguarding blocks of work time is essential. You need to protect your time by saying "no" to various interruptions, activities, requests, or persons. Interruptions are a two-fold problem: the interruption itself, and the expectation

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of further interruptions. Both reduce your effectiveness considerably. Even ten-minute blocks of time can be used constructively if you have pre-planned tasks that need that amount of time.

Some interruptions can be avoided by keeping in mind the following.

- Arrange your work area so that your back is to the traffic flow.
- Close your door; open it selectively.
- Find and use a special space such as a library carrel or an office where friends will be unable to find you.
- Return telephone calls when it is more convenient for you, perhaps when you take a study break, or simply unplug your phone.

In all of your organizing activities, the key to success is practicality. Consider such "mundane" factors as library hours, bus schedules and routes, and turnaround time for the computer.

Also recognize that there are specific limits as to how much actual "organization" is helpful. Beyond a certain point, adding techniques may simply create additional time problems rather than solving previous ones.

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